



The Fayetteville Observer

REGIONAL EDITION

VOL. CXCII-No. 255

SUNDAY, JUNE 1, 2008

www.fayobserver.com

\$1.50

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE NEXT HURRICANE?

■ Visit www.fayobserver.com/special/hurricane for a real-time tracking map, links to emergency agencies and disaster supply tips.

■ Inside today's paper is a tracking map, emergency contacts and guidelines for stocking up for a storm.



Don't be too calm before a storm

■ Experts worry that the region's booming population may not realize how devastating a hurricane strike can be.

By **Chick Jacobs**
Staff writer

Think Fayetteville is safe from hurricanes?

Think again. The coast isn't all that far away.

"If a Category 4 hurricane is heading for Fayetteville, that distance will vanish fast," said Jeff Orrock. He's the warning coordinator for the National Weather Service in Raleigh and a veteran of more than a dozen hurricanes.

INSIDE

■ Experts debate the value of long-range forecasts, Page 13A

It seems to people who haven't been through a major hurricane that you'd be safe," he said. "Now, look at a map. As the crow flies or the hurricane travels, Fayetteville is what, 60 to 70 miles away from the ocean?"

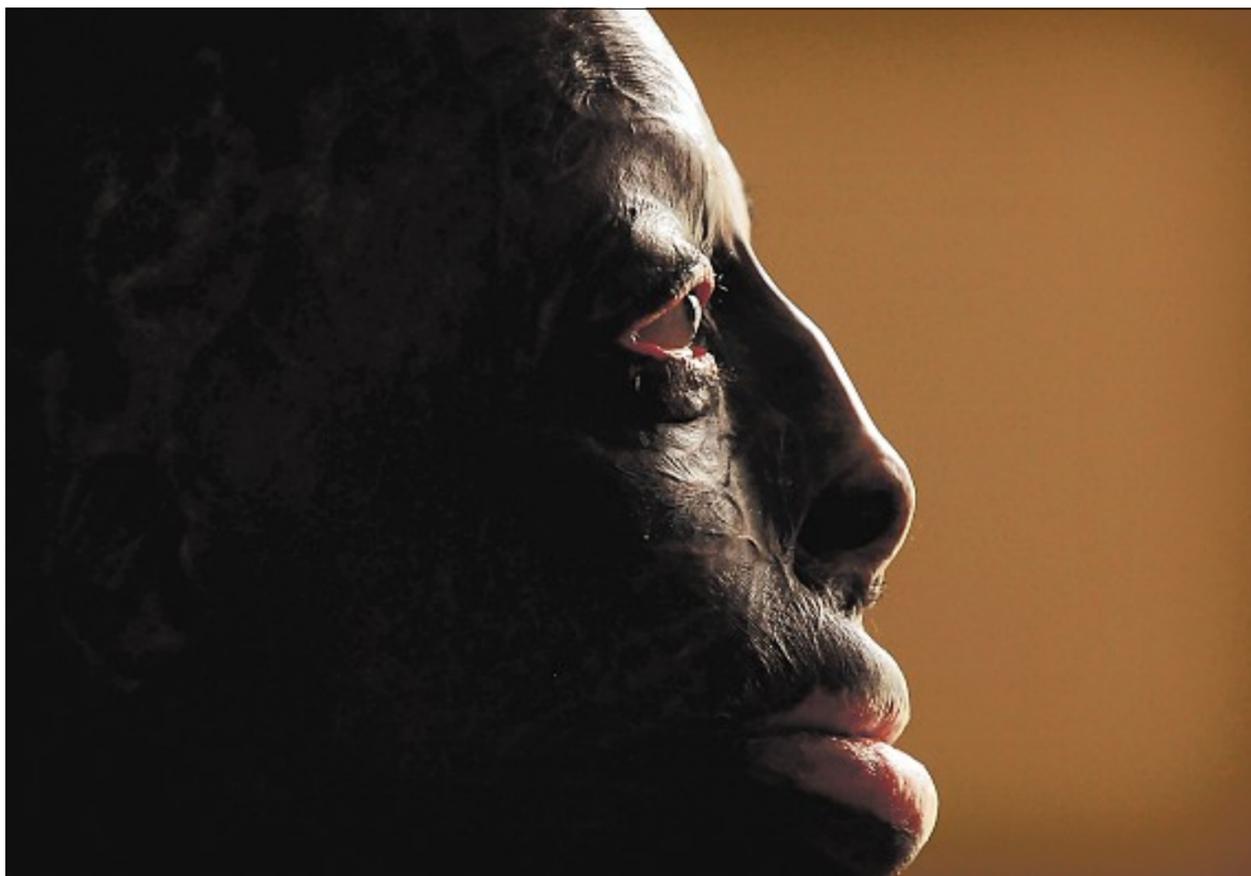
"If you've got a hurricane with an eye 30 miles wide, by the time it's ashore, the eye is halfway there."

It's been more than a decade since the Cape Fear region was hammered by a hurricane. That was Fran, which hit in September 1996.

Fran left 24 people dead, \$5 billion in damage and countless personal tales. It became the story people would tell their children about: days without electricity, food spoiling and reeking without refrigeration, the choice

See **HURRICANES**, Page 6A

SCARRRED LIFE



Staff photo by Andrew Craft

Lew McDonald suffered burns over 83 percent of his body when, in 1977, his mother's boyfriend set him and his family on fire.

Lew McDonald was 10 years old when his mother's boyfriend doused his family with gasoline and set them ablaze. His mother, sister and brother died. Lew survived but could not escape the anger, pain and depression that followed.

By **Michael N. Graff** ■ Staff writer

He wouldn't run. All those thoughts racing through his mind, and never once did he consider running.

Lew McDonald stood in the front yard. All alone. Just 10 years old. His mind, not his legs, sprinting.

His mother, younger brother and baby sister were inside the house, waiting to die.

His mother's boyfriend had flipped. Wanted to burn the whole family. Instructed Lew to go outside and find the gasoline.

But Lew knew it was inside. He'd put it there after cutting grass the previous day.

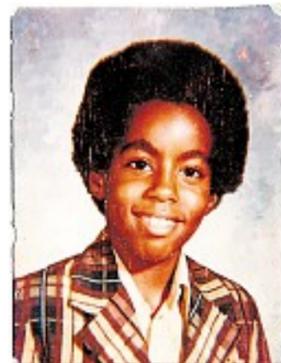
Lew thought of hollering for help, or throwing a rock through his neighbor's window, or setting some caged dogs free and letting them chase him into the house, hoping they attacked the boyfriend.

But then, the boyfriend found the gas can, between the refrigerator and the stove, right where Lew left it. The boyfriend called for Lew once. Then again.

Finally, at 3 a.m. on April 6, 1977, Lew McDonald made a decision that shaped the rest of his life.

"We all gonna die," he told himself. "(Forget) it."

See **MCDONALD**, Page 4A



As a child, Lew dreamed of becoming an athlete. He played baseball with his brother and sister the day before their deaths.

Delegates to get half votes

■ There are indications that the fight over Michigan and Florida will continue.

By **Nedra Pickler and Beth Fouly**
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic Party leaders agreed Saturday to seat Michigan and Florida delegates with half votes at this summer's convention with a com-

promise that left Barack Obama on the verge of the nomination but riled Hillary Rodham Clinton backers who threatened to fight to the August convention.

"Hijacking four delegates is not a good way to start down the path of party unity," said adviser Harold Ickes.

Clinton's camp maintains she was entitled to four additional Michigan delegates.



The decision by the party's Rules Committee raised slightly the total delegates Obama needs to clinch the nomination. Clinton advisers conceded privately he will likely hit the magic number after the final primaries are held Tuesday night, but said the ruling threatened to dash any hopes of a unified party.

See **DELEGATES**, Page 7A

Boy drowns hours after grandfather is buried

By **Michael N. Graff**
Staff writer

Rescuers pumped water furiously from a backyard pond in Hoke County on Friday night, hoping they could make it to the last drop without finding Bo.

But, shortly after 10 p.m., off in the deep end, they started seeing

brown hair.

The 5-year-old boy had drowned. Then, they turned their focus to consoling Bo's father, who had buried his dad hours earlier.

Now, he had to learn, he'd lost his son.

Jerry "Bo" Scott apparently fell See **DROWNING**, Page 6A

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TOMORROW

■ **A link to history:** Time is running out for a Victorian-era Chatham Street building.
■ **Life:** Now that flying light is a requirement, we'll show you how to pack a lot into a little carry-on.

WEATHER



■ Scattered storms; high around 89, **8B**



Staff photo by Andrew Craft

Lew McDonald spends a lot of time alone in his apartment playing video games. He has had more than a dozen jobs and lives on disability payments.

McDonald: Life marred by drugs, money struggles

From Page 1A

The boy walked back toward the house, fear putting one foot in front of the other.

Knowing the front door jammed shut the harder it was closed, Lew slammed it behind him, as if he were sealing a coffin.

Then he sat down on the kitchen floor, just to his mother's left. His 7-year-old sister was to his mother's right. His 9-year-old brother was directly in front of them.

He closed his eyes as the gasoline dripped down his face, pooling beneath his bottom. He heard his mom's last words — "This stuff is getting in my baby's mouth," — and the boyfriend's response — "Shut the hell up. I don't care."

Before he felt the flames, Lew McDonald heard the sound.

Whoosh.

■ ■ ■

The disfigured man taps away on the video game controller, rarely shifting his focus from the television. There's a convenience store cup on the table and some worn Fruit of the Looms lying on the ground. He's playing a boxing game — "Fight Night, Round 3."

It's a Thursday afternoon.

"Wanna see me whip Sugar Ray? I'll kill Sugar Ray. I hate Sugar Ray. I'm Hagler."

Llewellyn "Lew" McDonald is 41 now.

His mother, Margaret, would be 69.

His brother, Shawn, would be 40.

His sister, Candace, would be 38.

Margaret, Shawn and Candace are buried in a row in the Second Baptist Church cemetery in Fayetteville.

Lew rarely leaves his couch. He's trapped in his home. He's trapped in a financial mess. He's trapped in a monster's skin.



Contributed photos

Margaret McDonald, center, was 38 when she died. Shawn was 9; Candace was 7.

He's trapped, forever, in that fire. This isn't an uplifting story. There's no hallelujah moment. It is, however, one of survival.

Just not much more.

Lew — who wears skin grafts from his thigh all over his body, who can't gain weight because the grafts around his torso are wrapped tight as duct tape, who can barely write a letter because his knuckles were welded in a bent position during the fire — lives alone.

He's never had a girlfriend he didn't pay for. He's been addicted to cocaine and alcohol. He's been in and out of favor with his remaining family. He's been shot. He's moved back and forth between Cincinnati and Fayetteville. He's had more than a dozen jobs, quitting most of them. He's written worthless checks to get his medicine.

He's broke, in so many ways.

Those who care about him are constantly conflicted: How much of his situation has he brought on himself? And how much is the fire's fault?

Nobody, Lew says, will ever understand.

"I never knew in a million years I'd wake up one day and be as (messed) up as I am," he says. "Whoever thinks whatever about me, so be it. They have a different life than I have. ... I don't wish it on anybody, but if you really want to understand, get down and I'll show you. The only way to show you is for me to light you up."

■ ■ ■

The afternoon before the fire, they played baseball in the yard, a friendly game with a big, red plastic bat.

Lew was the athlete; Candace and Shawn had the book smarts.

They had good genes on their mother's side, genes that produced people such as Charlie Baggett, the former Michigan State football star and current assistant coach at the University of Washington; or Ike Walker Sr., the former E.E. Smith High School basketball coach; or Ike Walker Jr., the current Jack Britt High School basketball coach.

Lew dreamed of becoming a star athlete, too. But he didn't mind his mother, about anything. She refused to allow him to play organized sports

until he straightened up.

He struggled with that. He stole candy from a grocery store. He hid in the loft of a building once when he knew his mother was looking for him. More than a few times, his mom came home from work expecting him to be there watching his brother and sister, only to hear the basketball bouncing down the street.

"Llewellyn Corvett McDonald!" she would call.

And then she'd spank him.

Margaret, the mother, was a "beautiful girl," according to her uncle, Ike Walker Sr.

She was a social worker. She raised her three kids by herself.

She'd had them out of wedlock, with a married man.

Before giving birth, Margaret married another man, Eugene McDonald, which is where Lew and his siblings got their last name.

Within a few years, Margaret divorced Eugene.

Then, after the children were born, she started an off-and-on relationship with Ervin Lee McKinnon, a textile worker and a

heavy drinker with a short temper.

Margaret's aunts and uncles didn't like him. They approached Margaret in her driveway one day and told her she needed to break it off.

"Or else he's going to hurt you," they told her. "Or worse."

But Margaret wouldn't listen. She let her new boyfriend move into her home in Holiday Park, just off Owen Drive.

On April 5, 1977, Ervin Lee McKinnon had his 34th birthday.

He went drinking.

He came home shortly after midnight, and he and Margaret started arguing. It woke the children.

■ ■ ■

Best Lew could see through the flames, this is what happened after the fire started:

Shawn was the first one to run, bolting to the front door.

But McKinnon pushed Shawn to the ground. By now, McKinnon was ablaze, too. He hadn't left himself a getaway route, having put the family between him and the door before setting the fire. So, his only escape route was through the flames.

"Stupid as hell," Lew says.

When McKinnon made it to the door, he couldn't pull it open. It was jammed, just like Lew wanted.

Lew stood between the kitchen and the living room, flames peeling away his childhood, and watched McKinnon try to fight his way out.

"Well, my job is done," Lew thought.

Lew started toward the bathroom.

He felt somebody tugging at his back. He thought it was McKinnon. So he pushed the hand away.

But the tug wasn't from McKinnon.

It was from Candace, the tiny

See **MCDONALD**, Page 5A



Staff photo by Andrew Craft

To use a video game joystick for his PlayStation 2, McDonald rests the controller on his leg. A boxing game is his favorite.

“I never knew in a million years I'd wake up one day and be as (messed) up as I am. Whoever thinks whatever about me, **so be it.** They have a different life than I have. ... **I don't wish it on anybody,** but if you really want to understand, get down and I'll show you. The only way to show you is for me to **light you up.**”

Lew McDonald

”

McDonald

From Page 4A

7-year-old. She was following her big brother.

When Lew slapped her hand, she turned and went to her bedroom. Before she went in, Candace stopped at the bedroom doorway and looked at Lew, who was down the hall in the bathroom doorway. They caught each other's eyes and stared but exchanged no final words.

"I couldn't say nothin'. I was on fire," Lew says. "I saw her get up under the covers. And I went into the tub and turned on the water."

When the firetrucks rolled up, Margaret and Candace were in the front yard. McKinnon stumbled and fell in the front yard, coming around from the back.

As medics started to treat them, Lew appeared in the front doorway.

Shawn was inside, matted to the floor in the living room.

Margaret went to UNC Hospitals. She died five days later.

McKinnon went to Winston-Salem, with minor burns, compared with the others.

Candace and Lew, the only children still living, were sent to the Shrine Burn Institute in Cincinnati.

Candace died a month after the fire, lying in a bed in the same room as her brother.

Months passed before Lew realized he was the only one to survive.

He had burns over 83 percent of his body.

■ ■ ■
Mary Ann Tally has devoted her life to public defense. She's worked hundreds, if not thousands, of cases over a career that spans more than three decades.

She can't remember every detail of every case.

But she'll never forget Lew's face. The 11-year-old testified at the sentencing part of the criminal trial against McKinnon.

"It was such a tragic case because of the little boy," Tally said. "I just felt terrible about that child."

Knowing prosecutors had piles of evidence — including a deathbed statement from Margaret McKinnon — Tally advised her client to plead no contest.

After Lew's testimony, though, Judge A. Philston Godwin Jr. wasn't in the mood to be lenient. He handed McKinnon four life sentences plus 20 years, saying then, "This is one of the saddest cases I've ever seen."

Neither Godwin nor Tally knew just how sad it could become.

■ ■ ■

His looks. That's what struck people. That's what made people cry. That's what made people gasp. That's what doctors spent years reconstructing.

When the burn center released Lew, he flew home to Fayetteville to a celebration that included family and television cameras.

His great-aunt, Mamie Baggett, took control of his care. One of the first things she did was sit him down at the kitchen table and try to convince him he was normal.

"You're going to be like a regular person," she told him.

That was about the extent of the psychological care Lew received. For all the money and time spent piecing him together on the outside, his mental rehabilitation was minimal.

He still battles depression, spending days upon days holed up in his apartment with nothing but a video game.

He thinks about the fire every day. But it just makes him angry.

He's angry at his mom: She should have pulled her kids out of the situation. He's angry at McKinnon: He should have walked away that night. He's angry at his family: He says they don't do enough to help him.

He's angry at the world: You don't have to live like him.

"He's a difficult young man to

"I'm sorry for what happened, but I didn't do it. I didn't kill nobody," says Ervin Lee McKinnon. He is serving four life sentences plus 20 years for the burning deaths of Margaret McDonald and two of her children and severe injuries to Lew McDonald. He is in prison at Odom Correctional Institute.

Staff photo by Michael N. Graff



Staff file photo

Lew McDonald is met by family members on his return to Fayetteville on Oct. 7, 1977. He had been in Cincinnati at the Shrine Burn Institute for treatment of his injuries. The Cumberland County Shrine Club helped pay for his care.

help," said Ike Walker Sr. "He has a lot of people that feel sorry for him and want to help. But he tends to rebel, on account of the help he didn't get at the time he was burned."

"He has that bitterness about him." Lew doesn't deny it.

"I'm anything you want to describe like that," he said. "Malice. Vindictive. All that. I have every right to be."

Each of those feelings is a brick in the wall standing between Lew McDonald and a life beyond the fire. And he doesn't care. He doesn't want to get over it. And he says you wouldn't, either.

One subject, in particular, Lew may never be able to confront.

He has no desire to hear the next part of this story.

■ ■ ■
The road to Odom Correctional Institute is long and straight, two lanes cutting through a soybean field.

At the end of this path to prison are two gun towers. Guards in the first stare hard. Visitors are told to check in at the second gun tower.

At any given time, at least four remotely operated doors stand between Ervin Lee McKinnon and the outside world.

He sits at a lonely square table, not much larger than a board game, in a room large enough for full-court

basketball. He wears a green cap, green pants, a white T-shirt and saucer-size, thick-rimmed glasses.

He takes off the cap when greeting his visitor.

He's waited years to talk.

For two hours, he does. He fidgets in his chair. His eyes bounce, never focusing straight ahead. His story takes the same scattered path.

He didn't set anybody on fire. At least, that's what he says. Or, perhaps, that's what he believes.

"I'm sorry for what happened, but I didn't do it," he says, his eyes fixed on the floor in the corner of the big, empty visitors' room. "I didn't kill nobody. I never killed nobody in my life."

Neal Vaughan, the superintendent at Odom, says he doesn't talk to inmates about their crimes. His job is to serve the orders of the court.

But, Vaughan said, it's not uncommon for prisoners to convince themselves of their innocence.

"Sometimes, a person's perception of what happened becomes reality," Vaughan said.

McKinnon says Tally, the public defender, tricked him into making the no-contest plea. He didn't understand what it meant, he says. Tally says she spelled it out as clearly as she could. And the judge did, too. Ike Walker Sr., Lew's great-

On the Web

■ Hear the voices of Lew McDonald and Ervin Lee McKinnon in the online version of this story. Visit www.fayobserver.com.

uncle, was in the courtroom when McKinnon pleaded. Walker remembers the judge asking McKinnon three times if he understood his plea.

Each time, he said yes.

McKinnon has an extensive story about that night. It involves him driving to Hoke County to get beer, picking up his grandmother's car, driving to another girlfriend's house only to see that she wasn't home, then losing a highway patrolman attempting to stop him for speeding on Interstate 95 before finally making it to Margaret's house.

He says they started arguing because he didn't pick up cake and come home earlier for his birthday.

He believes Margaret's former husband, Eugene, climbed through a bedroom window and started the fire. He believes he was reaching down to get a beer when Eugene splashed gas on his back, and he stood up and hit the pilot light on the stove to start the fire.

"To be honest with you, I wish I'd have died, too," he says.

While having McKinnon's story relayed to him, Lew keeps his head down, managing only a few half-hearted grunts — chuckles, perhaps.

"I guess he wants for somebody to feel sorry for him, huh?" Lew asks. "Is that where his psyche is?"

■ ■ ■
Wearing shorts and a T-shirt, Lew McDonald pushes open the door to the Wachovia bank in downtown Fayetteville and sprints across the street, dodging traffic.

He's hoping his \$300 government stimulus check posted. He's out of breath and frustrated as he hops in the passenger's seat.

"Not yet," he says, holding up his bank statement. "Still minus \$84."

That's his ending balance, as of early May.

When he turned 18 in 1984, he had access to about \$30,000, money from his mom's insurance that his great-uncle invested for him.

Days after his birthday, he spent \$10,999 on a new Buick Regal.

The money was gone by 1987. He started getting a disability check. But he blew that mostly on drugs and booze. What he didn't spend, others spent for him.

"Lew probably had a lot of friends, and maybe not all the time for the right reasons," said David Pickens, who has known Lew since they were teenagers.

In 1992, Pickens said, he and Lew were driving along when Lew asked to stop at a gas station. He needed to talk to a guy, Lew told Pickens.

Then Pickens heard a gunshot. Lew had been hit in the leg.

Lew's transgressions frustrated his family. When Mamie Baggett died in 1992, she included a line in her will saying her children should always take care of Lew's living situation.

In 1995, Lew made the job easier for them. He moved back to Cincinnati.

He worked fueling planes and cleaning bathrooms before landing a job handling packages at DHL. At \$11.81 per hour, it was the peak of his career.

But that was too much money, he says, because the government stopped his disability payments.

Then, in 2004, he thought he'd hit it big. He was in a car crash that wasn't his fault. A government truck had pulled out in front of him, leaving him with severe back damage.

When the settlement came, it was just enough to cover his medical expenses.

He couldn't lift packages anymore. He reapplied for disability pay.

Brandy Johnson is one of Lew's closest — and bluntest — friends from Cincinnati. She works 50 hours a week as a manager at McDonald's. She hated seeing Lew return to Social Security.

"Sometimes I think he's looking for the easy way out," Johnson said. "I feel he's content where he is now, living off government aid. And he's hoping that one day something comes through and he gets rich."

"He's got a 'poor me' syndrome." Lew now collects \$702 a month. His rent is \$337.

He had a corneal replacement surgery last fall because of an infection. His left eye is stitched halfway shut, the latest in a lifetime of physical problems.

He says he stopped drinking in 2004. Hasn't done cocaine since 1995. Both were costing him too much money, he said.

Lew says he would listen to job offers if somebody wants to hire a disfigured, tear-dripping, claw-handed, back-aching person. But he's worried about losing his disability check again if he makes too much money.

"This guy has been to hell and back," said Pickens, his childhood friend. "He's got his entire body disfigured. There has to be a little fallout from that."

■ ■ ■
Five people were in that Holiday Park house that night more than 30 years ago.

Three died. The two survivors have never really lived.

Ervin Lee McKinnon will be eligible for parole Sept. 28, 2020. He'll be nearly 80 by then.

Llewellyn "Lew" McDonald is serving a sentence of a different sort.

"Depression," he says, "that's worse than being locked up."

Lew doesn't have any beds in his apartment in Elliotte Circle. He sleeps on the couch. He keeps one bedroom door shut all the time. The other bedroom is littered with dirty laundry and old medical files.

He has a list of traffic-related offenses and a prostitution-related offense on his record, but nothing worse.

Lew often wonders what might have been. Had he not made it in sports, he imagines he would have joined the Army.

"I'm frustrated about everything," he said. "I should have a girlfriend, some babies and stuff. I should have a career."

This summer, Lew plans to move into his aunt's old house on Murchison Road, where he can live rent-free. He expects his family to fix it up first.

Until then, he'll stay here, playing a video game.

"I'm Hagler," he says. "I just keep on fighting. Just put me in the ring."

On the video game, Marvelous Marvin Hagler never loses to Sugar Ray Leonard. At least, not with Lew McDonald on the controller.

Of course, in real life, Leonard beat the previously undefeated Hagler in a 12-round decision.

That was April 6, 1987 — exactly 10 years to the day after the fire.

That night, people around the world celebrated Leonard's victory as an upset for the ages.

That night, while drinking at a house party with friends, Lew McDonald had \$50 riding on Hagler. He lost ... again.

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